1992

HEARTS FOR THE ARTS

Annual fund-raiser auction Saturday

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Auctioneer Tag Taggert surrounded by some of the art up for grabs Saturday.

By GAIL RICH
Sentinel correspondent

BUYING A WORK of art is a unique and, for most people, a rare pleasure.

Whether it's a print or painting for the wall; a piece of pottery or glass for the table; or a yard of silk so exquisitely painted or woven we don't know whether to wear it or frame it, the buyer has chosen an artist's living creation and made it a personal treasure, to be contemplated, admired, maybe even used ... and once in a while taken for granted, only to be rediscovered all over again for whatever qualities compelled the buyer to pick it in the first place.

It should be an even sweeter pleasure to know the money spent on such special treasures benefit the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County, an organization which, among other things, keeps local artists employed by sending them into the classrooms of our public schools through a program called SPECTRA (Special Educational Resources in the Arts).

Saturday night in the Civic Auditorium, at "Hearts for the Arts," the Cultural Council's annual fundraiser, over 300 works of art will be auctioned off, many at far below their gallery prices, at a great big Valentine's Day party.

Preview

- **WHAT: Hearts for the Arts benefit auction**
- **WHERE: Civic Auditorium, 307 Church St., Santa Cruz**
- **WHEN: Saturday, 5 p.m.**
- **TICKETS: $20**
- **INFORMATION: 688-5399**

The pieces are donated by Santa Cruz County's large community of painters, ceramicists, sculptors, mixed-media-ists, printmakers, et cetera — including nationally known artists like Carol Summer and Sol Aquino, along with local aesthetic heros whose names may not be household words but whose work enlivens the walls of public buildings, galleries and restaurants and thousands of private homes.

Many of those donating their work to the auction are SPECTRA artists-in-the-schools themselves, and are passionate advocates of the program.

"The arts are a critical part of a child's development," says painter Carmen Leon. "If we want our children to excel, we have to encourage them in the arts, where they can express themselves, and expand their horizons.

"I wish people could be in the classroom for that moment when a child goes from thinking 'I can't do this' to a breakthrough with an art project — suddenly realizing he or she has made something unique, that's theirs specially, that they can take home, share with their families.

"The moment when they realize they have the potential to be creative is like a light bulb going on. And of course that catapults them into believing in their ability to master other things — like math and reading."

Rebecca Alex, another SPECTRA artist, agrees. "I've seen teachers' opinions of some of their students' abilities totally turn around by having an artist in the classroom. Some special gifts just can't be discovered through normal testing procedures, but when children recognize their own imagination and originality in one of my classes, their self-esteem zooms and it spills over into all their schoolwork."

The Civic's doors will open at 5 p.m. for the first part of the evening: the "silent" auction. Dozens, then scores, of people swarm around tables heaped with art pieces, each lovingly framed, mounted, boxed or otherwise presented by its creator. There are also theater tickets, compact discs and other premiums donated by arts organizations, businesses and individuals in support of the Cultural Council.

A card is provided for each item, on which buyers scribble down bids before rushing off to the next table to see what other goodies there are. Someone else comes along and enters a higher bid — and the auction is on.

Strategies vary among eager art-hounds — there's the big pre-emptive opening, where a bidder starts high in an attempt to scare everyone else away. There's also the patient, small-increment technique, which requires the hopeful winner to stay close to the object of desire and keep topping successive bids by a dollar or two.

The silent auction closes at about 6:30, with some folks running frantically between tables if their hearts are set on lots of art, trying to keep on top of the bidding for each piece.

It's usually all over by about 8 p.m., when triumphant buyers can whip out their checkbooks or credit cards, settle up and claim their prizes. And if, in the heat of the moment, they've spent a bit more than they meant to ... Well, you can almost hear them thinking, "it all goes to the Cultural Council, and there couldn't be a better cause than supporting the arts in Santa Cruz, right?"

Even in the midst of the silent bidding frenzy, "Hearts" is very much a party, with bounteous goodies courtesy of Michael's Catering, and jazz music to buy beautiful things by provided by Steve Abrahms. Indeed, for some, the silent auction is basically a cocktail hour prelude to the main event: the live auction. They've devoted themselves to scouting the higher-ticket artwork, and such other specialties as dinner/theater/hotel packages, reserved for the audible part of the evening.

Veteran professional auctioneer Tag Taggert will officiate at the live event, where it's still possible to get a great art bargain, though every year more and more knowing collectors make it a point to be at "Hearts" to take advantage of the great opportunities. The Sol Aquino piece being offered this year, for example, already comes with a pre-bid from a Los Angeles gallery.

The public may preview some pieces that will be auctioned off at "Hearts" on exhibit around the county till Saturday morning at Ford's in Watsonville, Stationery Outlook in Aptos, Capitola Book Cafe, Palace Arts in Santa Cruz and the Santa Cruz Art League and Civic Auditorium.